

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for Bill #5283 which secures equal funding for agriculture education. My name is Oliver Kelsey, I am a student in the Suffield Regional FFA Chapter. I am also my chapter's Reporter for the 2021-2022 school year. Agriculture education has helped me in so many ways, people always overlook its importance because they don't see its deeper value. They think that it is just teaching kids to be farmers and that anyone could throw a few plants in the ground or raise a few chickens, but that is far from the extent of Ag Ed. Agriculture has let me find my passion for horticulture and environmental science along with help me grow on a more personal level. During my sophomore year in the program I was diagnosed with extreme dissociative PTSD. I was admitted to a hospital after my first suicide attempt and have been in and out of therapy programs since, but the one main form of therapy that has always helped me is agriculture. It sounds stupid right? How can learning about plants help ground someone with suicidal ideation? The answer is that it gave me an outlet. Whenever I felt lost or didn't know where to go, I would head to the greenhouse and repot a plant, I would mix soil, I would teach others how to water and cull plants. When I felt like all I did was destroy everything I touched, and felt like I could and would never be good enough I made flower crowns and corsages. Ag gave me a community where I could not only be myself, but allow myself to learn that not everything is black and white. You can try at something for years and it may never be exactly perfect, and that is okay. Sometimes you put your heart and soul into a seedling and it just never germinates, or you spend hours on an arrangement just for your hydrangea to shatter before the big event, and that is okay. We adapt, we learn, and we overcome. Agriculture education teaches kids about agriculture yes, but it also teaches them important life skills and lessons that every day teachers just don't have the chance to teach. Lastly in terms of my future, ag ed has given me a beautiful resume whether it be the career development events through the FFA, or running a school based floral business, agriculture education has given me the skills and opportunities to make it in the real world. I just wish that this gift could be preserved for the future generations of agriculturists. Which is why I urge you to consider passing Bill #5283, to give more students like me an opportunity at life. Thank you again, It was an honor.

Oliver Kelsey
Suffield Regional FFA